

The South Danvers Observer

The Origins of George Peabody's Generosity

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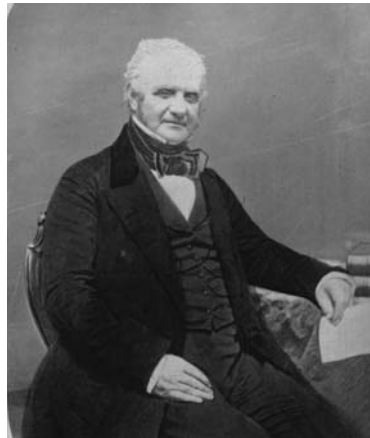
February 12, 1857 — Our own George Peabody has done it again! His donation to the city of Baltimore will establish an Institute unlike any other he has created thus far. This newest institution shall be his greatest yet. There will be a specialized reference Library, a Lyceum, an Academy of Music, an Art Gallery, and to encourage all students, prizes to Baltimore's best scholars

This exciting news piques the curiosity of many, causing them to ask, 'when and where did Mr. Peabody's generosity originate?'

Though only *he* can truly answer that question, perhaps if he were asked, he might tell us that much of his life has been influenced by his service during the War of 1812.

Brief though his service was—only 14 days in all— it became the cornerstone for most of his life. Because it was then he met two men who would shape his future in ways he could not have foreseen.

The first man George



Peabody met was Elisha Riggs. In 1814, Riggs was 35 and Peabody only 19. Whatever Riggs saw in the younger man must have impressed him, because only one year later, he offered Peabody a partnership in his business. Riggs, Peabody and Company was formed.

The second man George Peabody met during the War of 1812 was John Pendleton Kennedy, who would one day become the Secretary to the Navy. It has been with Mr. Kennedy that George Peabody has worked to create the latest Peabody Institute.

"What a noble, liberal and capacious principle of good feeling and elevated purposes actuate this man! How few like him in any country!"

John Pendleton Kennedy writing about George Peabody, February 7, 1857

Institute.

Wherever the seeds of Peabody's generosity were sowed, Mr. Peabody has never forgotten his home town, because it was here where his first donations were made.

In 1835, two years before he sailed for London, he donated enough funds to complete our Lexington Monument. In 1843, he aided our South Church to rebuild after the devastating South Danvers fire. And upon the 1852 celebration of the Centennial of Danvers' separation from Salem, Mr. Peabody donated the funds to establish his very first Institute. Two years later, he created the Peabody Medal for meritorious scholars of the Peabody and Holten High Schools. And just this past December, Peabody donated the funds for the creation of a branch library in our neighbor, the town of Danvers.

The creation of this latest Institute demonstrates more than ever that Peabody's generosity grows greater with every passing year.

"I request you to accept this trust as my friends, amongst whom, I hope there will ever be found the utmost harmony and concert of action, in all that relates to the achievement of the good which it is my aim to secure to the City."

From letter of George Peabody on the Establishment of an Institute in the City of Baltimore

"You have proved, sir, that politics and diplomacy are not the only fields on which may be won an honorable renown. You have given to us the benefit of your example, and when the record of this evening shall, in our annals, become historical, it will be seen that we of this generation, at all events, knew how to estimate the good sense and the good heart that were alike companions in the Maryland merchant of 1820."

J. H. B. Latrobe to George Peabody at the Reception given by the Maryland Historical Society, Jan. 30, 1857

More on the Baltimore Institute

February 1857—The legacy of George Peabody's gifts to our town are well-known. That he chose South Danvers as the location of the first Peabody Institute will ever be a source of pride to us.

With Mr. Peabody's latest donation—to create a new Institute in the City of Baltimore—many have wondered just when Mr. Peabody first began to consider such a gift.

We have learned through William Edward Mayhew, a Baltimore merchant and friend of George Peabody that it was as far back as 1851. He reports that in a letter dated the 23rd October, 1851, Mr. Peabody mentioned his desire to do something for Baltimore.

The beginning of the letter gives some hint of the nature of Mr. Peabody's humor.

Telling Mr. Mayhew how sorry he is for neglecting to answer sooner, he says, "I am in reality not quite so bad as you think me."

Going on, he confesses that "For more than two years old memorandums 'write Mayhew' has stared me in the face, on the departure of every Steamer and as often caused a

blush for my neglect and ingratitude."

He reminisces of his meeting Mr. Mayhew's wife in Saratoga Springs in 1822, before saying:

"I hear often of all my Baltimore friends & I assure you that I feel as much interest in them and their beautiful City as Ever. With regard to my feeling for the good of the City I am going to give a more substantial proof than words and I now enter upon the subject.

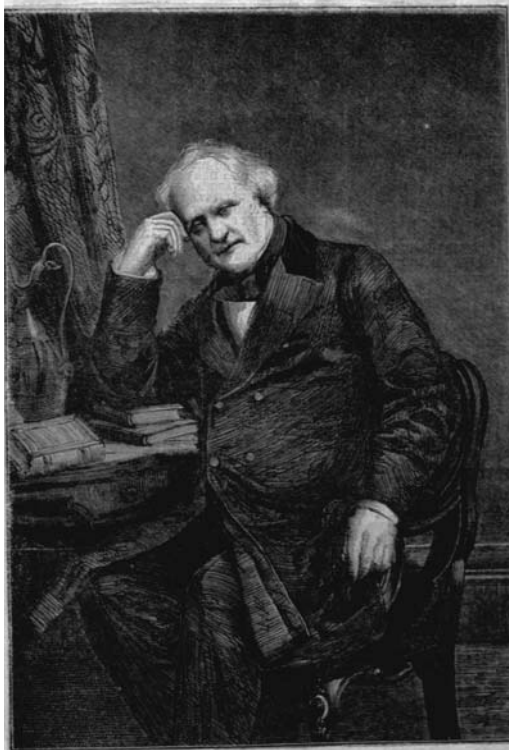
"I received last month a letter from Wm. H. Keighler (formerly associated with our friends who are now gone Shaw & Tiffany) calling my attention to the great importance to the interests of the City of Maryland Institute and asking a Satisfaction. Since I received that letter I have made inquiries of Baltimoreans & find his views & opinions fully confirmed.

"I enclose a note addressed to him which if you approve of the Institution and of the act, you will please deliver it."

Though it took nearly six years for his promise to be completed, the latest Peabody Institute is a legacy to a man we are proud to name our native son.

I enclose a note addressed to him, which if you approve of the Institution and of the act, I have with you to carry out you will please deliver it, if not destroyed retain the note until you can confer with me. — If you deliver

Excerpt from the Oct. 23, 1851 letter of Mr. Peabody's to William Edward Mayhew, asking Mr. Mayhew to deliver his enclosed note to Wm. H. Keighler of Baltimore.



The Branch Library of the Peabody Institute

February 1857—It wasn't long after his October 9th visit to our town that Mr. Peabody expressed his desire to create a branch library to be located in Danvers.

Having seen how well his original wishes for the first Peabody Institute were accomplished and how those of South Danvers have reaped the benefits of his generosity, Mr. Peabody wishes those in Danvers to enjoy of the same advantages we have had these last two years.

And so, he sent a note to Mr. Joshua Silvester, asking him to meet him at the Danvers railroad to discuss his intentions.

Mr. Silvester had previously made the acquaintance of George Peabody in London. His first voyage to Europe occurred in 1845 for the purpose of introducing to England the manufacturing of pegged shoes. Later trips were to promote the interests of the Good-year Rubber Company. Having learned of Joshua Silvester's presence in England, Mr.

Peabody invited him to his Fourth of July celebrations held in London.

It was at the Danvers depot that Mr. Peabody told Joshua Silvester he wished to present to Danvers \$10,000 for the creation of a Branch library. Mr. Silvester later met George Peabody at the Revere House in Boston where he presented a list of persons suitable to receive such a gift.

And so, on December 22, Mr. Peabody sent to the Trustees a letter stating his intention of donating \$10,000 to create a Branch Library in Danvers.

According to his letter, Mr. Peabody wishes the library to be called "The Branch Library of the Peabody Institute." \$3,000 shall be used for the purchase of books "and the fitting up of a room or rooms for their reception," and the remaining \$7,000 to be invested, so that the income can be used for the Lyceum and Library, for rent and defraying any expenses which might occur.

"It has occurred to me that a branch Library might be established in Danvers in some central position. . .and would secure to the inhabitants of Danvers a more equal participation in the benefits which it was my design to confer upon all."

From the December 22, 1856 letter of George Peabody to the Trustees of the Peabody Institute in South Danvers

Excerpt from George Peabody's letter to Robert S. Daniels, dated December 22, 1856



George Peabody in 1814

“When in the financial crisis which at one time convulsed the Republic from centre to circumference, anxious capitalists, and trembling annuitants abroad, expressed their fears that Maryland would be constrained to repudiate her contracts and obligations, Mr. Peabody stood boldly forward and vouched for the integrity of her people.”

On George Peabody’s work to sell Maryland’s bonds in 1837

“I had the honor, some twelve years since, whilst on a visit to London, as a guest of Mr. Peabody, to partake of his princely hospitality. Whilst in London the credit of our State was openly assailed in every direction, but almost in the same breath the vindication and pledge of our distinguished guest greeted my ear, promising for Maryland that repudiation should never stained her escutcheons. Yes, gentlemen, George Peabody, the man of honest dealing, whose character was known and appreciated throughout Europe, thus rendered to our State an incalculable service, one which every Marylander in Europe at that time appreciated as a boon of the richest value.”

From speech of J. Morrison Harris at Reception for George Peabody by the Maryland Historical Society, on Jan. 30, 1857

From Near and Far

“It is true, I was no born ‘in your midst’, but at the early age of 19 my hard struggles for commercial fame were commenced, in a very humble way, within a short distance from the place we now occupy. It was here I labored and surmounted the difficult periods in the commercial history of Baltimore of 1816, 1819, and 1826—receiving courtesy, kindness and encouragement from her most influential citizens, which took a strong hold on the best feelings in my hearts, and I have ever felt, as I now feel, and as I am sure I shall every feel—an adopted son of Maryland and proud of my citizenship.”

George Peabody speaking at his Reception by the Maryland Historical Society, January 30, 1857

“You refer to me as a soldier of the War of 1812. In that year I enrolled myself in a volunteer artillery company in George town, commanded by Colonel Peter and for a short time, while expecting an attack from the British fleet, in 1813, was stationed at Fort Washington. The author of the *Star Spangled Banner* was a private to the same mess with myself. On moving to Baltimore, I became a member of the ‘United Volunteers’ under Capt. Wm. Cooke, still among you, hale and hearty at 80, but not in time to have the honor of standing ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with the brave citizens of Baltimore in their glorious and successful defence of their homes in 1814.”

George Peabody’s recollections of his service during the War of 1812, from his speech at the Reception by the Maryland Historical Society, Jan. 30, 1857



George Peabody while in London

“But so far as Baltimore is concerned, the crowning proof of Mr. Peabody’s long cherished regard for this city is exhibited in the munificent donation of three hundred thousand dollars he has placed in the hands of trustees for the purpose of establishing and endowing an institution open to all classes of our fellow citizens and embracing within its scope a free library—annual lectures on science, literature and the arts—a gallery of choice paintings and statuary—an academy of music—and annual prizes to the graduates of the Public High Schools and the school of design attached to the Maryland Institute.”

On George Peabody’s Donation to Baltimore

“Carried by the circumstances of your life away from Baltimore, as you had been borne by them from Danvers, and looking back to your country from abroad,—you, seeing all this too, saw also as bright particular spots, the homes that you had left in Massachusetts and Maryland. From these your regard seem never to have been alienated, and indeed, during your whole residence in England, your life has been passed in testifying, in all honorable ways, not only your esteem for your country, but your affection for your countrymen.”

From speech of J. H. B. Latrobe at Reception for George Peabody by the Maryland Historical Society, on Jan. 30, 1857